Why republish Houston Stewart Chamberlain's Foundations of the Nineteenth Century? This ponderous book is not a work of scholarship nor even a discussion of recognizable historical facts. Yet after its first appearance in 1899, the Foundations enjoyed great popularity, passing through twenty-eight editions until 1942, and such popularity must count for something. And, in fact, the ideas and prejudices that fill this work aroused considerable sympathy in the minds of many German-speaking readers. If we find the arguments tortured and their logic fallacious. this was not the impression Chamberlain's hundreds of thousands of readers came away with. The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century is a historical document of great importance; it is a vital part of that German ideology which influenced not only the educated classes but filtered down to the rest of the population as well.

Edmond Vermeil has called Chamberlain "the best known of the Nazi doctrinaires."1 This simplifies the problem with which his philosophy confronts us today. To be sure, Alfred Rosenberg, the Nazi ideologue, saw his own Mythos of the Twentieth Century (1930) as a continuation of Chamberlain's work, and believed that Chamberlain was the first to state clearly all the consequences of the supposed Germanic superiority over all other peoples and races? But the Foundations is a more important work than the Mythos of the Twentieth Century. A great number of copies of Rosenberg s book were sold but it was read by few, while Chamberlain"' work pioneered a "meta-history'' that was of vast importance both for its content and style Chamberlain praises the dilettante over the specialist in the introduction to the Foundations. The dilettante, unlike the specialist, is will ing to construct a synthesis of all historical event' and trends of the past—and on the basis of such a truly cosmic construct to form his own dogmatic conclusions about the future of man and his world. These conclusions must then have a general validity. They must not only be descriptive of the whole human past but must also be prophetic and illuminate the future of mankind. Others had written ''universal history." but here such writing played a primary role in the construction of the final synthesis within a historical framework of philosophy, religion, and science. However different his conclusions. Oswald Spengler's Decline of the I Fest also belongs to this genre. Such histories attempted to reconcile divergent forces like religion, philosophy, and science, and Chamberlain confidently undertook this task in his book. The result was a picture of civilization which saw in the German the savior and therefore the leading power of the world. The basis of German greatness was the Aryan race, which drew unto itself all the qualities of creativity and organizational genius that other races lacked. But this is to put the argument too simply, because what impressed the readers was precisely the pretentiousness with which the argument was put forth. They were swept away by the show of broad learning in history and philosophy as well as science. These disciplines became part of the overall world view and were distorted in the process; but the way in which they suffered at Chamberlain's hands was to determine the view of history, philosophy, and science of a whole generation committed to this Germanic ideology as a way out of the dilemmas of modernity.

Chamberlain did not shirk the central issue: science and religion did seem opposed to each other. In order to construct his synthesis he turned to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, which became basic to his thought and about which he was to write a two-volume work (1905). His reading of Kant can be summarized as follows: on the one hand, there was a Germanic science, which determined with the utmost accuracy that which existed empirically; on the other hand, there was a Germanic religion founded by Luther, which opened infinite vistas to the German soul. This religion took priority, for it

alone could fathom the “essence of things'* (Kant's Ding an Sich) and keep science within its proper bounds while, at the same time, appropriating empirical evidence in support of itself.3 Race was both an established fact of science and a part of the essence of things.

What was this religion that Luther had founded? If Kant was decisive in forming Chamberlain's synthesis of civilization, Richard Wagner was equally important in determining his view of religion. Wagner became the “sun of his life,” and the composer's ideals of the “new music” were the “firm center” and “resting point” of his own spirit? In Wagner’s work he found a synthesis of music, visual art (staging), and Germanic ideology—“the highest flight of Aryan consciousness,” as he described it later in life? Chamberlain's religion was the mysterious union of musical ecstacy, worship of nature, and the Germanic heritage. Such a religion was for Aryans only.

Christ himself became, in Chamberlain's hands, the archetype of this faith—a non-Jewish Christ who, as an Aryan, reacted against supposed Jewish formalism and hardheaded rationalism. The Foundations reflects this religion : it is the measuring rod against which the supposedly materialistic Greeks and Jews are measured in the light of history. The natural sciences were sucked into this mystique while, at the same time, giving added respectability to Chamberlain's thought in the minds of his vast number of captivated readers.

Yet there was actually little new in this thought. A few years earlier Paul de Lagarde had already preached a similar “Germanic religion” and there were others who followed suit. But this is just the point—Chamberlain's book took its place within an already present stream of thought, while having enough unique twists and turns to make it stand out from the rest. Reading the Foundations means acquiring familiarity with a mainstream of Germanic thought and pondering on how such ideas could have appealed to so many people over such a long span of
time.

A brief review of Chamberlain’s life helps one to understand how he could relate himself to this German national mystique and indeed become one of its chief prophets. He was born in Portsmouth (1855), where his father was a captain (later admiral) in the English navy. Chamberlain was educated first in France and then at Cheltenham College, an English public school (or “private school," as we would call it in the United States).'There he seems to have rebelled against the “sober emphasis" upon traditional subject matter and the exclusion of all creative arts from the curriculum. The harsh discipline of Cheltenham and its unimaginative teachers turned him toward the arts, especially music.6 Chamberlain wrote in later years that he had always been a compulsive dreamer, leading a vigorous dream life side by side with his waking hours. Such a person would have responded badly to the discipline and curriculum of an English public school, and we know of many other boys in this milieu who turned to cultivating their inner lives, the “soul” which proved so receptive to an emotion-centered mystique. Moreover, Chamberlain's dreams focused not only upon people but especially upon a romantic nature replete with mysterious mountains and deep-running streams.7 Here the search for a religion that was close to nature and the race may have found its first encouragement.

Illness forced him to leave the school and take cures in Germany, which was destined to become his spiritual home from 1870 on. Germany gave him a feeling of liberation. He was no longer imprisoned within the discipline of a school but was taught by his own sympathetic tutors. Chamberlain began

studying science, especially the structure of plants and their roots. Eventually he wrote a long dissertation on this subject, which was accepted by the University of Vienna in 1889.

Chamberlain belonged to the class of "private scholars," men who had advanced degrees but who never entered the academic, or indeed any other profession. There was not enough room in the academic world for all those who took higher degrees, many taking them for the status they afforded, rather than as a guarantee of university employment. We do not really know why, in his youth, Chamberlain never tried for such a career; perhaps it was his ill health, or the fear of being rejected—in all likelihood his contempt for the specialist played a part. The class of "private scholars" existed in Europe as a whole, but in Germany, with its undue emphasis upon academic prestige, it was apt to further a group of disgruntled outsiders who were constantly knocking at the door of university recognition. The majority of the prophets of the Germanic race belonged to this class, many of whom formed what has been called the "academic proletariat." Unable or unwilling to use their learning in accepted channels of academic reward and prestige, they sought instead to become critics and prophets. As disgruntled outsiders with little money at their disposal (like Chamberlain who suffered chronic poverty) such men opposed present society, indeed all of modernity, and sought to connect their knowledge to the glorious future of the race to which they did belong (as many professors did not). Some, like Paul de Lagarde, eventually obtained univer

sity chairs alter having spent half a lifetime condemning sterile academic knowledge. There is as we have seen no evidence that Chamberlain ever wanted to become part of the academic establishment; eventually (he Wagner circle at Bayreuth sufficed to give him a place in the sun. He shared the attitudes of the "academic proletariat" : Chamberlain could have been a professor of botany but he became a prophet whose condemnation of specialists in the introduction of the Foundations is identical to the condemnation of professors that runs through the works of his fellow Germanic writers. Academic knowledge was swamped by the ambition to remake the world as a whole in order that the Aryan might dominate it. Chamberlain's pursuit of scientific research did not mean that he led a tranquil life confined to a laboratory. He traveled a lot. living for a time in Geneva and Dresden, visiting watering places in search of good health, which eluded him most of his life. Eventually he settled in Vienna for twenty years (1889-1909) ; then he moved to Bayreuth, where he spent the rest of his days (190927).?It could be hazarded that his search for a spiritual "resting place" had its foundation in his early restless life. Moreover, ('hamberlain's constant ill health may well be connected with his admiration for vigorous and dominating heroes: whether it be Wagner's Nibelungen or the young Hitler. There is a similar connection between ill health and admiration tor Germanic heroes in the philosophy of one of his famous older contemporaries, the historian Heinrich von Treitschke. These facts should complete the psychological picture which, whatever weight one may choose to give it, made Chamberlain receptive to the mystique of race and Germanism, encouraging his search for a spiritual resting place. Chamberlain's "path towards Bayreuth" began in 1872, shortly after his arrival in Germany. But study and listening to Wagner's works for many years had to take the place of the pilgrimage to Bayreuth. Finally, in 1882, Chamberlain had saved enough money to attend the Festival and see the master in person. Bayreuth became not only the "home of his soul" but eventually his physical home as well. Chamberlain's personal connections with Bayreuth came about, not through friendship with Richard Wagner (who died in 1883) but through an increasingly close relationship with Wagner's wife, Cosima, the daughter of the composer Franz von Liszt. Cosima Wagner devoted herself to her husband's heritage and made Bayreuth the center of the Wagner cult. She encouraged works like Leopold von Schroeder's The Completion of the Aryan Mysteries at Bayreuth.? which reflected her own view of her

husband's place in history. Small wonder that she found a soulmate in Chamberlain, who in 1895 published a long book on Richard Wagner with similar content. Cosima Wagner actively encouraged the writing of the Foundations and received the work with admiration. A convinced racist, she singled out the passages dealing with the Jews. Germans, and their relation to religion as the most inspirational? After Chamberlain's death Wagner's ninety-lwo-year-old widow reminisced (1930) that his settling in Bayreuth was of such importance in

her life that he continued to speak to her in the quiet of her sou!.10 Chamberlain's friendship with Cosima Wagner was climaxed by his marriage to her daughter Eva in 1908. Now he was a member of the "master's" family as well as the propagandist for Cosima's concept of Wagner's work and thought. No doubt his close association with Bayreuth contributed to the popularity of the Foundations. Reading this book can give one an idea of the kind of ideology that was current among Wagner's admirers, whom Cosima had gathered at Bayreuth—the "Wagner circle" through which many of the prophets of Aryan predominance passed. To be sure. Chamberlain himself asserted that Darwin, not Wagner, provided the primary inspiration for his racial theories. He interpreted Darwin's concept of the struggle for the survival of the species as proof that race determined the course of all life. Typically enough, he faulted Darwin for not realizing the full consequences of this truth, but he praised him for providing the empirical proof that inevitably led to such a conclusion." However, it seems clear that Chamberlain had acquired the concept of race before he happened upon Darwin, and that the Origin of Species was used to provide his doctrine with the kind of scientific respectability for which he longed so much. Science was distorted as he integrated it within his total world view; a synthesis which was based, in the last resort, upon a Germanic mystique closer to Wagner than to Darwin. The Foundations reflects the "ultra

Wagnerian nonsense"12 which Cosima cultivated so carefully and which, in turn, became a part of the mainstream of Germanic nationalism. The Foundations is, without doubt, the most important work that reflected this dubious inspiration.*As Chamberlain put it on another occasion: eventually the ideals of Bayreuth will show their strength in a way hardly dreamt of at present—the strongest will win and the strongest is he whose thought is "mythical."13 Nothing Chamberlain undertook during the rest of his life could rival the influence of this book. He was now accepted as a Germanic prophet and corresponded with the young Emperor William II who, admiring Bayreuth, was himself attracted to Chamberlain's work.' During the First World War he became a busy propagandist for the German cause, until his delicate health finally collapsed. From then until his death in 1927, he remained a semiparalyzed invalid. Others of his persuasion became pessimists as Germany lost the war and a republic seemed to endanger the very existence of the Aryan race, but not Chamberlain, for he had always been optimistic about the Aryans' future. Once Chamberlain had found a resting place in his ideology, there was little that could sap the strength of his convictions. This the more so since in the midst of German collapse he discovered the prophet who would lead the Aryans to victory. At the Bayreuth Festival of 1923 he had been introduced to Adolf Hitler. Hitler met Chamberlain at Wagner's house and was

greatly impressed.14 There is little doubt that Hitler knew the Foundations,Chamberlain did not play an essential role in the formation of his thought. Hitler later criticized Chamberlain for believing that Christianity could have any reality on a spiritual level—even as an Aryan religion.'5 It is interesting to note that the one major criticism which Cosima Wagner made to her friend about the Foundations concerned Chamberlain's apparent denial that Christ could be known through prayer.16 Nor. as a matter of fact, was Chamberlain quite as single-minded on the Jewish question as the future Fuhrer.

Chamberlain belonged to a school of racial thought that distinguished between the evil of “Judaism" and the individual Jew. He wrote to Leopold von Schroeder about his friendship for many “wonderful” Jews. Yet Jews must be eradicated from German cultural life because in the last analysis their Jewishness is bound to the evil and materialistic principles of Judaism. We must neither hate the Jew nor apply humanitarian principles in order to allow his participation in German life: the Jewish question can only be solved through meeting the Jew as a foreigner.17 Many others made such a differentiation between the individual Jew and Judaism as an evil principle, but there is no evidence that Hitler ever permitted himself such fine distinctions. Hitler hailed Chamberlain as a famous Ger

manic prophet, but there is no evidence that he helped to determine the course of his life. In any case, the literature of both racism and Germanic thought has a basic similarity that makes it difficult to venture which particular work was decisive in forming Hitler's ideology. To be sure, some may have joined the Nazi party because their hero Chamberlain admired the Fuhrcr.18 Much more important, in the long run. was the academic respectability which the Foundations, as a supposedly learned tract, gave to Nazi racism and the Ger manic cult. The book could be used both on the Nazi road to power, and to consolidate control over the German mind once power had been achieved. The German longing for academic respectability plays an important role, not only in the Foundations' reception, but also in the use that could be made of the work by racist-oriented political movements. This German trait is unique; nowhere else in Europe did rightist and nationalist movements feel such a need to bolster their ideologies by a show of learning Even in German popular literature the hero—strong, kind, and courageous—was apt to combine such praiseworthy traits with an exhibition of encyclopedic knowledge.10 In Germany ideologies had to show themselves as “true" through a combination of philosophical, historical, and scientific analysis—producing the meta-history of which the Foundations is an important example. The German scholarship of the nineteenth century that all Europe

rightly admired had this attitude as one of its byproducts. Men saw the prestige of this scholarship and greedily grasped the meta-history that was put before them, but they failed to separate true from pseudo learning. If the meeting at Bayreuth did not markedly influence the development of Hitler's own thought, it acted as a catalyst upon Chamberlain. Here, Chamberlain wrote, was a man who was all heart, who loved his people and who showed a courage reminiscent of Martin Luther.20 Chamberlain described the future Fuhrer as "the true awakaner (of souls] and at the same time the giver of rest.”21 This phrase can symbolize the trend of the whole Germanic ideology, that national mystique which was to lie so fateful to the world and so attractive to many in the German-speaking regions of Europe. The Aryan anti his religion were to be awakened by a messiah who would purge their nation of its ills and reconquer its rightful place in the world. But at the same time, this awakening meant a new rest fulness: for the Aryan had now discovered his own inner nature and his soul. This concept of life echoes throughout the Foundations, and Adolf Hitler, who gave this feeling of restfulncss to the aged and infirm Chamberlain, would eventually provide it to the nation itself. This appeal was common to both National Socialists and to those conservatives who regarded the Nazis as a dangerous mass movement. Chamberlain’s influence touched many conservatives more directly than Adolf Hitler, even though they were at times ambivalent about the racial theories in the Foundations. Such a leading conservative of the nineteen twenties as Moeller van den Bruck could proudly list Chamberlain as one of his intellectual ancestors.22 Within a certain circle of German youth before, during, and after the First World War, Chamberlain's work also attained important influence. Members of the German Youth Movement, which contained some of the nation's most articulate youth, liked the combination of a Germanic religion with racial superiority which the Foundations ascribed to the Aryan.23 Longing for a “true"

integration with the Tolk was made easier through such a meta-history, which gave supposed depth and scholarly respectability to this idealism. Here again, the Foundations could be counted in the mainstream of the German nationalist mystique and its influence could radiate widely across the whole spectrum of the population, whatever the individual's party or group affiliation.‘Chamberlain himself never joined in active politics; he merely counseled such nationalist pressure groups as the Pan-German League.24 Yet the book he wrote typifies an attitude and trend of thought that not only ate deeply into the nation but eventually became an awesome reality. There is an intimate connection between the popularity of this book and the bloody history' of our times.